THE GENETIC BASIS OF HUMAN CANCER

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This book represents a comprehensive resource text on the genes that cause cancer. It was originally designed as an addition to the textbook Metabolic and molecular bases of inherited disease and in fact 42 of the 52 chapters have been adapted from the 8th edition of that text.

The Vogelstein book is organised into four distinct sections. The first eight chapters provide a detailed explanation of the basic concepts of cancer genetics. Included in these chapters are sections on the nomenclature of gene mutations and chromosomal alterations. This information would be of particular value to clinicians and counsellors who are in receipt of technical mutation reports from specialised laboratories. Chapters nine to 12 are devoted to the cell cycle, apoptosis, oncogenes and tumour suppressor genes.

The third set of chapters (13-39) deal with the familial cancer syndromes under the subsections of defects in caretakers and gatekeepers. These chapters are a delight to read. They cover the clinical and pathological manifestations of each familial cancer syndrome as well as the genetic basis of the disease. The real strength of these chapters lies in the succinct descriptions of the gene discovery process, the key sites of mutations and the link between mutation and disease. These chapters would be an ideal resource for those individuals seeking to gain a deeper insight into the genetic basis of a particular disease. They are not designed to provide comprehensive or practical clinical management guidelines.

The final chapters (40-52) discuss a number of common malignancies in which predisposing mutations may have a role. The focus here is naturally on somatic mutations however the information is once again of the highest quality. My only criticism of this book is that many of the diagrams and photographs have been poorly reproduced and there are no colour illustrations. It is, however, a beautiful resource book and should be in the library of all clinical and research cancer departments.

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